

**SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING
SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA, 23-24 JANUARY 2012**

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

I. INTRODUCTION

The Socialist International is an organisation constantly meeting new challenges and expanding its activities into new countries and regions. As the largest global organisation of political parties, our International advances shared goals and political objectives across the world and continues to broaden its horizons. In recent months, among our many activities our organisation has for the first time convened meetings in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Windhoek, Namibia, as well as the constituent meeting of the new Special Committee on the Arab world we agreed at the last Council, and this Council meeting itself takes place in a country which had not previously hosted an SI event. This continued ability to advance the cause of social democracy on a global scale, carrying our hopes and aspirations around the world is a hallmark of our organisation which we must always seek to preserve.

Today, we are proud to be in San José hosted by the National Liberation Party (PLN), our member in government in Costa Rica working hard to advance our common social democratic agenda and ideals. I would like to therefore take this opportunity to thank wholeheartedly the PLN, President Laura Chinchilla and the President of the party Bernal Jiménez for their warm welcome and fraternal hospitality during this Council and close cooperation over recent months on its organisation. With our last Council having taken place in Europe and our forthcoming XXIV Congress to be held in Africa, it is fitting that we come together now in Central America, able to meet on different continents but each time in places where an SI member party is in government, putting into place policies which reflect our mutual goals and objectives.

Our organisation continues to address issues at the heart of the international agenda. Over the two days of this Council we will tackle two of the greatest challenges faced by the international community today: finding solutions to the ongoing crisis in the global economy and the efforts to find meaningful agreements to prevent climate change.

II. RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL

Climate change

In line with our commitment to fighting climate change, as will be discussed here in San José, we convened a meeting of the Socialist International Commission for a Sustainable World Society and environment ministers from member parties of the International in Johannesburg, South Africa on 30-31 October 2011, to discuss the social democratic priorities in advance of the COP17 conference on climate change which took place in Durban from 28 November-9 December.

President Jacob Zuma, who opened the meeting, referred to the contribution of the Commission's work to the outcome of COP16 in Cancún, expressing his belief that the meeting in Johannesburg could fulfil a similar role in relation to the Durban summit. South Africa's priorities, the President continued, were based on a balanced, fair and credible outcome to COP17.

At the time of the meeting in Johannesburg, our organisation had high hopes for progress on the Green Climate Fund, on the formalisation of pledges for deeper emissions reductions and on adequate financing for mitigation and adaptation measures, even at a time of global economic turmoil. Of great significance was the holding of the negotiations in Africa, one of the continents most affected by climate change, and the concept of climate justice was to be central to a positive outcome from Durban.

During the discussion, particular attention was paid to the situation facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are threatened with disappearance under rising sea levels if the global temperature increase is not limited. The fact that those countries which are least responsible for climate change are suffering disproportionately from its consequences was also raised, with a clear realisation from all those present that the onus was on developed economies to show more leadership and accountability. As at the previous Commission meeting in November 2010 in Mexico City, a declaration was adopted which set out the hopes and expectations of the organisation for the upcoming conference.

In line with the course of action agreed at this meeting, SI President George Papandreou and I attended the High-Level Segment of the COP17 Summit in Durban where we organised a meeting of ministers and government representatives from SI member parties present, to examine the state of the conference negotiations, as well as a series of discussions with other delegations and representatives of global NGOs and civil society. Following the establishment of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action we presented our conclusions in a statement, underlining that the international community must persevere within the framework of the UNFCCC to come together in search of solutions, as multilateralism continues to be the only way forward.

The need to take measures to counteract the increased vulnerability of some countries to climate change, in particular those with limited financial resources, was also made by the SI Presidium at its yearly meeting at the United Nations in New York. The renewed difficulty in meeting the world's growing energy needs from clean sources was underlined by the uncertainty over the future use of nuclear energy following the disaster at Fukushima nuclear power plant, a subject which had been one of the main themes on the agenda of our last Council meeting in Athens.

Financial crisis

The fourth annual meeting of the SI Presidium at the United Nations General Assembly once again brought together members of the SI leadership and heads of state and government from SI member parties on 23 September 2011, holding discussions on the current impact and consequences of the global financial crisis, the contribution of social democracy to combating racism and intolerance and how to ensure the success of the COP17 Summit in South Africa.

Heads of State and Government attending the meeting were President of Iraq Jalal Talabani, and President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, both Vice-Presidents of the International, President Hifikepunye Pohamba of Namibia, President Boris Tadić of Serbia, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior of Guinea-Bissau, Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam of Mauritius and Prime Minister Igor Luksic of Montenegro. As at the previous meetings of the Presidium held in Athens in March and in July last year, the personal attendance of a significant number of SI Vice-Presidents ensured the authority and continuity of the discussions.

The current impact and consequences of the global financial crisis on different areas of the world economy and in different regions were discussed in detail, with a keen sense that countries' economic well being was to a large extent determined by the fortunes of the global economy, reflecting the difficulties faced by all governments in tackling the results of a crisis on a scale none had predicted. The need for a recovery based on growth was underlined, along with the urgency that progressives reclaim the ideas originating from our movement which are the correct response to the current situation, by doing so regaining or increasing electoral competitiveness.

In the discussions there emerged a strong consensus that elected representatives needed to have more control over the markets to prevent the kind of excessive risk taking that precipitated and exacerbated the global financial crisis, but that this would only be effective if action taken by governments was coordinated at an international level. The responsibility of members of the global social democratic family was to ensure that this response prioritised growth in the real economy and job creation whilst finding ways to better communicate this response to the electorate, underlining that there is no solution to the current crisis that can simply be applied to a single region.

The period since the last Council has also been characterised by the reaction of ordinary citizens to the effects of the global financial crisis, personified in the 'occupy' and 'indignado' movements seen across the world. The support of the SI for these causes, which share our organisation's vision of a collective humanity, was underlined in an statement issued in October entitled 'We are all *indignados*', carrying the message that much-needed

changes in the global financial architecture have yet to be implemented and remain vital to a recovery based on sustainable growth.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration, the need to reinforce the contribution of social democracy to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was underlined. The Presidium was also informed of the application submitted by Palestine for full UN membership earlier that day, and received the gratitude of Fatah for the support of the SI and its members, underlined by the upgrading of the party's membership status at the Athens Council, and a reiteration of the commitment of that movement to non-violence as they try to advance in securing a two-state solution.

Democracy

With a significant participation in the meeting in New York from senior figures in the ranks of African member parties, the subject of democracy in Africa was also highlighted, as was the importance of the solidarity of the Socialist International and its members to democrats in opposition. The importance of the democratic processes across Africa, and the role of social democracy in advancing them were underlined alongside the active engagement of the SI in political life in Africa, particularly important today in light of the many elections taking place on that continent up to the end of 2012, which were also amongst the main themes of the recent meeting of the SI Africa Committee which we organised in Windhoek on 29-30 July 2011.

The Committee met for the first ever time in Namibia, hosted by SWAPO, as participants from across the continent discussed 'Good governance in Africa: the economic and political agenda', 'Electoral processes in Africa 2011-2012' and 'Securing peace through conflict resolution'.

There was a broad consensus that the lack of good governance was intricately linked with a deficit of democracy known in some countries of the region and that it urgently required that the entire population was listened to and its aspirations taken into account in both the political and economic spheres. In order to move forward, to tackle poverty and to address the needs of the citizens, democracy needed to be linked with good governance, allowing for economic change and political stability.

Several national situations in relation to electoral processes in Africa were examined and taken as examples to underline that elections in some countries were still flawed, where the winner was known well in advance of the election, or where the Constitution and electoral laws were violated. Participants agreed unanimously on the need for voters to exercise their civic rights in free, fair, transparent and democratic elections, in order to prevent unrest among the population or the deterioration of the democratic credentials of the state.

Discussions also focused on reasons for conflict, ranging from the spreading of civil wars from neighbouring countries or tensions resulting from ethnic and religious diversity, to high levels of poverty and famine caused by the unequal share of natural resources, corruption and the collapse of political institutions. The protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance and a sustainable economic and social development were all seen as crucial factors for peace, security and stability on the African continent. The Committee also reaffirmed the position adopted by the SI Council at its last meeting in Athens for a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict of Western Sahara.

The Windhoek Declaration resulting from the meeting highlights some of the key points of these discussions and calls for Africa to be represented among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Also agreed was the visit of a delegation of the International to Cameroon, in advance of the presidential elections of October 2011. Meetings were held on 9-10 August in Yaoundé with government authorities, the leadership of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), electoral authorities and members of the diplomatic community, and public calls made for the holding of free and fair elections. Regrettably, a number of serious shortcomings and irregularities were witnessed at the elections on 9 October and reported by the SDF, presidential candidates of the opposition, NGOs and civil society organisations including Transparency International Cameroon; I represented our International at those elections, together with other international observers from the African Union, the Commonwealth and la Francophonie.

The deficit of democracy seen in Cameroon is also evident in a number of countries in other parts of the world such as Central Asia. This was the main focus for discussion when the Socialist International held a meeting of its Committee for the CIS, the Caucasus and the Black Sea in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 2-3 May 2011, breaking new ground as the first ever meeting of the International to take place in Central Asia. Some countries continue to suffer from a complete absence of democracy and participatory political processes, whilst others have developed nascent democratic systems which need perfection and support. In this context, the committee discussed in depth the situation in Kazakhstan, which experiences unacceptable levels of inequality and authoritarianism and where only the ruling party was represented in parliament. Support was shown to the host party Nationwide Social Democratic Party 'AZAT' ahead of elections which took place on 15 January 2012. Again the anti-democratic practices of the government were in evidence with the banning of NSDP 'AZAT' Co-Chair Bulat Abilov from the election, which according to the OSCE 'did not meet fundamental principles of democratic elections'.

Also foremost on the agenda of the participants was the unresolved political crisis in Belarus that followed the December 2010 elections and continues to this day. The absence of Mikalai Statkevich, the BSDP-NH presidential candidate who remains incarcerated was keenly felt, and the International must ensure that Belarus remains at the centre of its work on political freedom and democratic values. Members of two opposition parties, the BSDP-

NH and BSDP-H, were present at the meeting in Almaty to give reports on the ongoing crisis and reiterate the importance of international support and solidarity and the influence that pressure from the international community could have on the authorities. In January 2011 I had visited Minsk to witness first hand the aftermath of the elections and personally show my support and that of our global family for democrats in Belarus including Statkevich, who regrettably was on 12 January once more tried and now faces three years under tougher confinement conditions.

The widespread presence across the CIS of political systems which do not genuinely allow the electorate to make a choice was noted in reports on national situations, where participants from Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine made reference to their specific concerns with regard to internal political developments. The holding of the meeting in Central Asia for the first time also allowed invitations to be extended to social democratic parties from neighbouring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, countries which face serious barriers to democracy, underlined by the inability of the Uzbek delegation to attend due to restrictions imposed by the authorities. We have of course all recently also been reminded of the difficulties faced by opposition parties in Russia where parliamentary elections were tainted by widespread fraud.

Arab Spring

The SI Special Committee on the Arab World, established at the last Council in Athens, held its first meeting on the island of Crete on 28-29 October 2011, hosted by PASOK, building on the close relations we have developed with frontline actors of the democratic struggle in the Arab World. Participating in the meeting were leaders and personalities representing progressive democratic forces from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara and Yemen. The solidarity and support of all the members of the Socialist International towards activists from democratic institutions, street movements and communities were underlined at the opening of the meeting by SI President George Papandreou.

The meeting took place in the aftermath of the first democratic ballot held as a direct consequence of the Arab spring, following positive developments from Tunisia, where legislative elections had been praised as free and fair with a high turnout. Egypt too has since held elections, though there remain many legitimate concerns over their conduct and outcome. Democratic governance as we have observed is in different countries the result of very diverse processes which have in common respect for the will of the majority. The Arab revolutions are of particular significance because they continue to represent the will of the majority of the Arab people for change.

Among the concerns raised in Crete were that those trusted with responsibilities during the period of transition fulfil their obligations to the citizens. Paying tribute to the ordinary

people who had contributed to the end of despotic regimes, the Committee stressed the importance of ensuring that the actors of change remain heard under the new political systems, with a need for the representation of women and young people who had played a fundamental role in the uprisings.

The goal of an end to the current oppressive regimes which continue to commit criminal acts of repression and violence against their citizens received the full support of the members of the Committee. We see now that the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, with the presence of Arab League monitors insufficient to end the violence by the regime against its people. Though Ali Abdullah Saleh is now due to leave power imminently in Yemen, it is unacceptable and contrary to our consistent calls for justice that anyone who bears responsibility for serious crimes against peaceful protesters be granted immunity.

The meeting closed with a declaration embodying the commitment of all participants to a mutual undertaking which we called “the spirit of Crete” for democracy and freedom in the Arab world. Since the meeting, the situation continues to evolve, and it is vital that we social democrats accompany these processes by strengthening partnerships with new democratic forces across the region and through the continued participation of our members in the planned initiatives which we will be launching.

The Special Committee referred to the need for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, an issue discussed in much detail at the meeting earlier last year of the SI Middle East Committee on 9-10 June in Tel Aviv & Ramallah. There, the International once again was able to bring together Palestinians and Israelis to hold exchanges on prospects for a lasting peace and a negotiated solution to their conflict.

Regional perspectives on global issues

The work of our regional committees has also centred on key questions facing parties and governments around the world. Global economic issues and questions of regional interest were on the agenda of the Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean at its most recent meeting in Porto Alegre on 24-25 October 2011, hosted by the Democratic Labour Party (PDT). ‘Facing the global financial crisis: ensuring economic growth through policies which promote greater equality and opportunities’; ‘Strengthening democratic institutions and citizen security in the face of organised transnational crime, drug trafficking and criminality’; and ‘Reproductive health and the right of women to decide freely in regard to their body and policies which do not violate the human rights of women’ were the main themes of discussion.

Reflecting on the global financial crisis the delegates participating in the meeting described to the Committee the measures implemented in their respective countries to confront the

current situation. The need to strengthen policies which promote stable employment and social investment to foster persistent, just, inclusive and sustainable growth in the region was singled out as a priority in line with the Socialist International's key objectives. In facing the international financial crisis, it was reiterated that only through policies which promote greater equality and opportunity could sustained economic growth be ensured.

In the discussions and exchanges on the second main theme, the Committee noted that compared with other regions, the levels of fear and victimisation, the high number of homicides, abductions and other violent crimes, along with the high levels of prison population in Latin America and the Caribbean, were a cause of great concern. Participants also reflected on the impact of organised transnational crime and the challenge it posed to the democratic institutions in the countries of the region. There was agreement on the need to promote policies which tackle the very causes of the problems, including marginalisation, the lack of opportunities, segregation and exclusion, as well as on the importance of coordinated international collaboration to address transnational crime in its entirety.

Those present concurred on the significance of opening the discussion on the subject of reproductive rights and the importance of knowing the reality which existed in the different countries of the region in regard to the reproductive health of women and their rights. The Committee called on member parties in the region to continue examining these subjects with a view to developing public policies which would guarantee the rights of women whilst providing the necessary health care, protecting the lives of both women and the young in general.

Delegates of the parties from the region participating in this meeting shared information on the development of the national political situation in their respective countries since the meeting the International organised in Bucaramanga in May 2011. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Declaration of Porto Alegre and the issuing of a statement on the announcement by ETA a few days before, declaring an end to its terrorist activity and the triumph of Spanish democracy.

The economy and climate change were key to exchanges in Ulaanbaatar on 'Combining economic growth with environmental responsibility: the dual challenge of development' and 'Advancing social democracy in the Asia-Pacific region', the main themes on the agenda of the recent meeting of the Socialist International Asia-Pacific Committee, which took place on 7-8 October, hosted by the Mongolian People's Party.

Maintaining the focus of the International on the defining issue of climate change, approached from a regional standpoint, discussions on the first theme centred on the impact of global warming on the region, and on ways to ensure that the income from natural resources benefited the population as a whole. The need to hold companies working in the exploitation of natural resources accountable with regard to the protection of the

environment was discussed at some length and different experiences examined. The regulatory role of the state was emphasised as well as the involvement of civil society and other NGOs in this process. The floods which had affected countries of the region highlighted a sense of urgency on these issues, as could be seen in Pakistan, Cambodia or Thailand, where large numbers of people were suffering; our International has long recognised that those states affected most by climate change are overwhelmingly those who have had little to do with its causes. In line with the position of our SWS Commission, it was underlined that fighting climate change was not only a challenge but also an opportunity to come up with fresh approaches to the current economic crisis to generate new areas for growth, new industries and employment. Ultimately, in that region as in other places in the world, the question centres on striking the right balance between development and environmental responsibility.

A strong desire was again manifested by those present to see social democracy grow in strength across the continent, where it has a relatively short history. During the discussions it was stressed that every step forward for democracy in the region was also a new opportunity for social democracy, as a new era of change is taking shape, driven in many countries by values and principles of our movement. The presence of invited guests including a representative of the Burmese National League for Democracy allowed the committee to extend its full support to Aung San Suu Kyi and the party in their efforts for a peaceful democratisation of Burma. Since the meeting there have been further promising developments which we will continue to follow with great interest, with a delegation of the International due to visit Burma soon.

The furthering of social democratic ideas was also discussed in detail along with approaches to resolving regional conflicts at the previous meeting of the committee in Manila on 20-21 May 2011. Coming shortly after the tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan, the Manila meeting also provided an opportunity to hear from the Japanese SI member party, the SDP, and debate the use of nuclear energy worldwide, with a call for stricter regulation and monitoring of nuclear power plants and coordinated action on nuclear waste management.

In Ulaanbaatar, the Committee adopted a statement on Mongolia, recognising the MPP's substantial contributions to the establishment of modern Mongolia and to the work of the Socialist International, and a second declaration addressing a number of national situations which were part of the discussions.

Focussing on social and economic issues in the Arab world, the most recent of our committee meetings was held just this 9-10 January in Rabat, where our member party the USFP hosted the Committee on Economic Policy, Labour and National Resources for discussions on welfare statehood in the Arab states, with participation from across the North Africa and Middle East region. Those present analysed the conditions necessary for social welfare and protection and how this could be achieved in the Arab world.

Strengthening our work

Throughout its existence, the SI has always sought to become stronger. Since the last Council, which established a working group on reform with the remit of formulating proposals on this issue, a healthy debate has taken place within our organisation on its future direction and structures. This working group held meetings on 12 September 2011 in Geneva and on 12 December 2011 in Marrakech and we invited members to submit their responses to a series of questions proposed by its co-chairs. I am optimistic that the discussions on reform will lead us to strengthen our organisation and empower it to be better equipped to carry forward our ambitious agenda and help us to ensure that our organisation can continue its politically meaningful work, be financially secure and be representative of the interests of all its members from all continents and regions of the world.

The International has also continued its work of fostering cooperation between parliamentarians from its member parties at the most recent assembly in Bern at a meeting on 17 October where exchanges were held on the principle themes of the Assembly's agenda and on how to advance cooperation between parliamentarians from the global social-democratic family. Participants were able to build on the discussions held at previous IPU Assemblies, including the meeting of SI parliamentarians held on 16 April 2011 in Panama City. The meeting also heard from Abdelouahed Radi, USFP (Morocco) first secretary, who received the unanimous support of the meeting for his candidacy for the presidency of the IPU and was duly elected.

Member parties

As Secretary General of this organisation, it gives me great pleasure to participate in party congresses of our members and express the support of our organisation for the work they do on a national level, and I have been thankful to attend many such meetings over the course of 2011. In addition to member party congresses and events, which included most recently the 100th anniversary festivities of the ANC in Bloemfontein this January, I had the honour last January to attend ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of the great internationalists of our movement, Bruno Kreisky.

The last six months have seen elections for a number of member parties. 2012 sees the SI member parties in at least 30 countries head to the polls, and we will of course follow these processes with great interest, accompanying our parties with observation missions and delegations where necessary. As touched upon already in this report, our great hope is that all our parties will be able to take part in elections under free and fair conditions.

III. LOOKING AHEAD

The most significant occasion in the life of our organisation this year will be our XXIV Congress, and the first to be held in Africa, which will be hosted by our member party the African National Congress in the Republic of South Africa. This event coincides with the party's 100th anniversary celebrations and will be a moment for our global political family to come together and reaffirm our will to set the course towards a better, fairer and kinder world society. I would like to record here my humble appreciation of the close cooperation and support we have received for this undertaking from the leadership of the ANC, including President Jacob Zuma, Vice President Kgalema Motlanthe and ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss the preparations for the holding of this event during the past months.

Prior to the XXIV Congress our regional and thematic committees will continue to meet to discuss those issues at the centre of our shared agenda and prepare the motions and resolutions that will form the basis of the Congress's discussions. Meetings will also take place of our Commission for a Sustainable World Society, in advance of Rio+20, and of the Commission on Global Financial Issues chaired by Joseph Stiglitz to continue the discussions we will hold here in San José and build on the Council's conclusions.

We know these are challenging times and there remain huge obstacles to a strong recovery in the global economy and to the legally binding agreement on emissions reductions our planet needs. Our movement has a vision, a commitment and positive proposals to overcome the huge obstacles we face. These prioritise real growth and social justice, yet we must do more to make our voices heard, speaking with clarity and unity to make our message one that can translate into the electoral success that has eluded some of our parties in recent ballots.

Wherever we are in government, our members show a responsibility both to their own citizens and citizens elsewhere in this interdependent world which we want to see defined by solidarity and common responsibility. We know this can be accomplished by ensuring fairness is at the heart of government policies; by prioritising the concerns and needs of our citizens; and by upholding democracy unflinchingly at home and using the means at our disposal to encourage it where it is under threat.

IV. CONCLUSION

The breadth and scope of our activities in recent months as outlined in this report are the mark of a truly global organisation inspired and committed to being a force for good. As social democrats, we have distinguished ourselves most clearly from conservatives and liberals by our belief in justice, even where that requires tough decisions and self-sacrifice. Our vision of economic justice envisages today that those responsible for the crisis must

carry the burden of recovery. Developed countries have the greatest responsibility for policies to combat climate change, as climate justice demands that developing countries be allowed to fulfil their potential and SIDS be allowed to continue to exist. There will be times when our members suffer electoral setbacks and are consigned to periods of opposition, but democratic justice requires that every party, wherever it is in the world, should have a chance to participate in free and fair elections.

We must approach the challenges ahead with determination and enthusiasm. Now more than ever our movement needs to have a sense of purpose and unity to be able to take on those who prioritise the interests of the banks over the people, who deny climate change whilst doing irreparable damage to the environment and who deprive their citizens of a democratic voice. I look forward to seeing you all in South Africa later this year.
